

code for a virtual space providing step, of providing virtual spaces for users of said user terminal devices;

code for a view providing step, of providing a different view for each of the virtual spaces on a display device of said host server device;

code for a monitoring step, of monitoring the user while said user is in a certain virtual step; and

code for a control step of automatically changing the display of said certain virtual space to the display of another virtual space on the basis of the monitored result by said monitoring step, so that said user moves on the virtual spaces.

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--19. (New) A method according to Claim 13, wherein said user terminal device has a transmission unit for transmitting information of the user to said host server device and said monitoring step monitors a state of the user on the basis of the information transmitted from said user terminal device.--

REMARKS

This application has been reviewed in light of the Office Action dated November 6, 2002. Claims 1, 3, and 5-19 are pending in this application. Claims 2 and 4 have been cancelled, without prejudice or disclaimer of the subject matter presented therein. New Claim 19 has been added to provide Applicants with a more complete scope of protection. Claims 1, 3, 5-9, 11-16, and 18 have been amended to define still more clearly what Applicants regard as their invention. Claims 1, 3, 5, 12, and 18 are in independent form. Favorable

reconsideration is requested.

A Claim To Priority and a certified copy of the priority document for this application were filed on February 9, 2001, as evidenced by the returned receipt postcard bearing the stamp of the Patent and Trademark Office, a copy of which is attached hereto. Applicants note the Office Action Summary sheet for the Office Action dated November 6, 2002 indicates that "some" of the certified copies of the priority documents have been received. Applicants presume this is a typographical error, because Applicants claim to priority is based on one Japanese Priority Application, 11-343115 (12/02/1999). Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request acknowledgment of the claim for foreign priority and the receipt of the certified copy.

The Office Action rejected Claims 1-18 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 6,330,022 (Seligmann).

Applicants submit that independent Claims 1, 3, 5, 12, and 18, together with the claims dependent thereon, are patentably distinct from the cited prior art for at least the following reasons.

The aspect of the present invention set forth in Claim 1 is directed to a control method of a home office system which includes user terminal devices and a display device connected to the user terminal devices. The method includes providing virtual spaces for users of the user terminal devices, providing a different view for each of the virtual spaces on the display device, monitoring the user while the user is in a certain virtual space, and automatically changing the display of the certain virtual space to a display of a virtual space for rest on the basis of the result in the monitoring step, so that the user in the changed virtual space for rest can communicate with other users existing in the common virtual space for rest.

One important feature of Claim 1 is that the display of the virtual space is automatically changed to a display of a virtual space for rest on the basis of the result of the monitoring step which monitors the user while the user is in a certain virtual space, so that the user can communicate with other users existing in the common virtual space.

Seligmann, as understood by Applicants, relates to an apparatus and method for providing a simulated video conferencing environment including live video conferees in variable conference contexts and controlling the conference during events such as conferee removal, temporary conferee departures or additions, and changes in conferee requirements. Apparently, *Seligmann* merely teaches that in a TV conference, a user's instruction operation is discriminated, and a display according to the discriminated operation is performed. As such, *Seligmann* might perform conference display that is selected by a user. However, nothing has been found in *Seligmann* that teaches or suggests disclose the feature of Claim 1, that the display of the virtual space is automatically changed according to the user's condition. Moreover, *Seligmann* does not teach or suggest that a user is moved from one virtual space to another virtual space for rest, and that incidental communication with other users who are by chance in the virtual space to which the user was moved, is provided for the user in question. That is, *Seligmann* does not teach or suggest that the display of the virtual space is automatically changed to a display of a virtual space for rest on the basis of the result of the monitoring step which monitors the user while the user is in a certain virtual space, so that the user can communicate with other users existing in the common virtual space, as recited in Claim 1.

Accordingly, Applicants submit that Claim 1 is patentable over the cited art, and respectfully request withdrawal of the rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a).

Independent Claim 3 is a computer-readable storage medium claim corresponding to Claim 1, and is believed to be patentable for at least the same reasons as discussed above in connection with Claim 1. Additionally, independent Claims 5, 12, and 18 include a feature similar to that discussed above, in which the display of the virtual space is automatically changed to a display of another virtual space on the basis of the result of the monitoring step which monitors the user while the user is in a certain virtual space. Accordingly, Claims 5, 12, and 18 are believed to be patentable for reasons substantially similar to those discussed above.

The other rejected claims in this application depend from one or another of the independent claims discussed above and, therefore, are submitted to be patentable for at least the same reasons. Since each dependent claim is also deemed to define an additional aspect of the invention, individual reconsideration of the patentability of each claim on its own merits is respectfully requested.

Newly added method Claim 19 corresponds to apparatus Claim 11, and is believed patentable for at least the same reasons as discussed above.

In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, Applicants respectfully request favorable reconsideration and early passage to issue of the present application.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our New York Office by telephone at (212) 218-2100. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our address listed below.

Respectfully submitted,



Attorney for Applicants

Registration No. 38,586

FITZPATRICK, CELLA, HARPER & SCINTO
30 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, New York 10112-3801
Facsimile: (212) 218-2200



VERSION WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES MADE TO CLAIMS

1. (Amended) A control method of a [user terminal device connected to a server device in a main office through a communication line and a] home office system [having] which includes user terminal devices and a display device [which is] connected to said user terminal [device] devices, said method comprising [the steps of]:
 - a virtual spaces providing step, of providing virtual spaces for users of said user terminal devices;
 - a view providing step, of providing a different view for each of the virtual spaces on said display device;
 - a monitoring step, of monitoring the user while said user is in a certain virtual space; and
 - a control step, of automatically changing the display of said certain virtual space to a display of a virtual space for rest on the basis of the result in said monitoring step, so that said user in said changed virtual space for rest can communicate with other users existing in said common virtual space for rest.

[monitoring a state of a user in a place where said user terminal device is located; and

judging whether or not the user has to take a rest on the basis of a

monitoring result obtained in said monitoring step,

requesting virtual rest space data for said server device if it is judged that the rest has to be taken by the user in said judging step; and

displaying a virtual rest space on the display device upon receiving the virtual rest space data.]

Claim 2 has been canceled.

3. (Amended) A computer-readable storage medium [which stores] for storing a program [to cause] of a [user terminal device connected to a server device in a main office through a communication line and a] home office system [having] which includes user terminal devices and a display device [which is] connected to said user terminal [device] devices, [to execute the following steps of] said program comprising:

code for a virtual spaces providing step, of providing virtual spaces for users of said user terminal devices;

code for a view providing step, of providing a different view for each of the virtual spaces on said display device;

code for a monitoring step, of monitoring the user while said user is in a certain virtual space; and

code for a control step, of automatically changing the display of said

certain virtual space to a display of a virtual space for rest on the basis of the result in said monitoring step, so that said user in said changed virtual space for rest can communicate with other users existing in said common virtual space for rest.

[monitoring a state of a user in a place where said user terminal device is located; and

judging whether or not the user has to take a rest on the basis of a monitoring result obtained in said monitoring step,

requesting virtual rest space data for said server device if it is judged that the rest has to be taken by the user in said judging step; and

displaying a virtual rest space on the display device upon receiving the virtual rest space data.]

Claim 4 has been canceled.

5. (Amended) A control apparatus of a virtual system which has plural user terminal devices and a host server device connected to said plural user terminal devices through a communication [line] network and creates [a] virtual [space] spaces, comprising:

a virtual space providing unit arranged to provide the virtual spaces for users of said user terminal devices;

a view providing unit arranged to provide a different view for each of the

virtual spaces on a display device of said host server device;

a monitoring unit arranged to monitor the user while said user is in a
certain virtual space; and

a control unit arranged to automatically change the display of said certain
virtual space to the display of another virtual space on the basis of the monitored result by said
monitoring unit, so that said user moves on the virtual spaces.

[user information obtaining means for obtaining information of a user in a
place where said each user terminal device is located;

user state recognition means for recognizing a state of the user on the basis
of information obtained by said user information obtaining means; and

virtual space control means for moving the user in the virtual space in
accordance with a recognition result obtained by said user state recognition means.]

6. (Amended) An apparatus according to Claim 5, further comprising an
imaging unit arranged to image the user, wherein [said user information obtaining means is
imaging means for imaging the user and said user state recognition means recognizes] said
monitoring unit monitors the state of the user on the basis of an image of the user outputted from
said imaging [means] unit.

7. (Amended) An apparatus according to Claim 6, wherein said [user state
recognition means recognizes] monitoring unit monitors a face direction of the user and said

[virtual space] control [means] unit moves the user to another virtual space in a case where the user looks toward said user terminal device with a predetermined number of times or for a predetermined time.

8. (Amended) An apparatus according to Claim 6, wherein said [user state recognition means recognizes] monitoring unit monitors motion of the user and said [virtual space] control [means] unit moves the user to another virtual space in a case where the motion of the user is in a predetermined condition for a period longer than a previously designated time.

9. (Amended) An apparatus according to Claim 5, further comprising an imaging unit arranged to image the user, wherein said [user information obtaining means is] imaging unit includes a voice sound information obtaining [means] unit for obtaining voice sound information, said [user state recognition means recognizes] monitoring unit monitors emotion of the user on the basis of the voice sound information obtained by said voice sound information obtaining [means] unit and said [virtual space] control [means] unit moves the user to another virtual space in case of judging that the user is in a great stress condition in accordance with the recognition result obtained by said [user state recognition means] monitoring unit.

11. (Amended) An apparatus according to Claim 5, wherein said user terminal device has [means] a transmission unit for transmitting information of the user to said host server

device and said [user state recognition means] monitoring unit provided in said server device [recognizes] monitors a state of the user on the basis of the information transmitted from said user terminal device.

12. (Amended) A control method of a virtual system which has plural user terminal devices and a host server device connected to said plural user terminal devices through a communication [line] network and creates [a] virtual [space] spaces, said method comprising:

a virtual space providing step, of providing virtual spaces for users of said user terminal devices;

a view providing step, of providing a different view for each of the virtual spaces on a display device of said host server device;

a monitoring step, of monitoring the user while said user is in a certain virtual step; and

a control step of automatically changing the display of said certain virtual space to the display of another virtual space on the basis of the monitored result by said monitoring step, so that said user moves on the virtual spaces.

[a user information obtaining step of obtaining information of a user in a place where said each user terminal device is located;

a user state recognition step of recognizing a state of the user on the basis of information obtained in said user information obtaining step; and

a virtual space control step of moving the user in the virtual space in accordance with a recognition result obtained in said user state recognition step.]

13. (Amended) A method according to Claim 12, further comprising an image step, of imaging the user, wherein [said user information obtaining step is an imaging step of imaging the user and said user state recognition step recognizes] said monitoring step monitors the state of the user on the basis of an image obtained [by imaging the user] in said image step.

14. (Amended) A method according to Claim 13, wherein said [user state recognition step recognizes] monitoring step monitors a face direction of the user and said [virtual space] control step moves the user to another virtual space in a case where the user looks toward said user terminal device with a predetermined number of times or for a predetermined time.

15. (Amended) A method according to Claim 13, wherein said [user state recognition step recognizes] monitoring step monitors motion of the user and said [virtual space] control step moves the user to another virtual space in a case where the motion of the user is in a predetermined condition for a period longer than a previously designated time.

16. (Amended) A method according to Claim 12, further comprising an image

step, of imaging the user, wherein said [user information obtaining step is] image step includes [structured by] a voice sound information obtaining step, of obtaining voice sound information, said [user state recognition step recognizes] monitoring step monitors emotion of the user on the basis of the voice sound information obtained in said voice sound information obtaining step and said [virtual space] control step moves the user to another virtual space in case of judging that the user is in a great stress condition in accordance with the recognition result obtained in said [user state recognition] monitoring step.

18. (Amended) A computer-readable storage medium [which stores] for storing a program [to cause] of a virtual system which has plural user terminal devices and a host server device connected to said plural user terminal devices through a communication [line] network and creates [a] virtual [space] spaces, [to execute the following steps of] said program comprising:

code for a virtual space providing step, of providing virtual spaces for
users of said user terminal devices;

code for a view providing step, of providing a different view for each of
the virtual spaces on a display device of said host server device;

code for a monitoring step, of monitoring the user while said user is in a
certain virtual step; and

code for a control step of automatically changing the display of said

certain virtual space to the display of another virtual space on the basis of the monitored result by said monitoring step, so that said user moves on the virtual spaces.

[a user information obtaining step of obtaining information of a user in a place where said each user terminal device is located;

a user state recognition step of recognizing a state of the user on the basis of information obtained in said user information obtaining step; and

a virtual space control step of moving the user in the virtual space in accordance with a recognition result obtained in said user state recognition step.]

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